

Early on in my Ham radio career, I had known about W2ZXM/MM - Captain Henrik Kurt Carlsen *1914-1989* A hero and sea captain who was also a ham, he was one of us!

It was the Hamburg to NY run leaving in dense fog December 1951 - A Christmas trip loaded with pig iron, coffee & 156 thousand in bank notes and 5,000 lb of English treasury notes, 8 mail sacks. Some have said, VW cars and some antiques were also in the cargo holds. Having ten passengers aboard and crew, headed for the States. The Flying Enterprise (KWFZ) 6,711 tons - sailed into terrible weather in the English Channel and took a heavy wave, leaning to port, she never recovered as the cargo shifted and Enterprise was doomed. Their position off England tip in the channel and sending out an SOS.



Captain Harry Grattidge bringing the 81,000 ton Queen Mary into Southampton 72 hours late on 29 December 1951 - described the seas “terrific” said, he had the worst double crossing for more than 30 years.

Originally born in Denmark, Carlsen a seaman since the age of 14 also became an American Citizen and did war duties for the War Shipping Service.

His home of record was in Woodbridge, N.J. Family

consisted of wife Agnes and two daughters. One of the daughters became a ham, I believe it was Sonja Fedak. Yet there is a record of Karen Mueller NØIDD born in 45 with an expired ticket. The maritime ordeal was over with 10 January 1952 with the world watching on. Capt Carlsen was the last one off the stack of the Flying Enterprise. That spring Carlsen appeared a joint session of Congress and received from President Harry Truman a special congressional award, the Distinguished Service Medal.

After Carlsen’s death in 1989 Woodbridge dedicated a park in his name - also a large portrait of the captain, painted by friend Mary Murvin, hangs in Woodbridge High School. Carlsen did not cash in on his own personal experience, the British Press dubbed Kurt as “Captain Stay Put” - In Falmouth, he received a hero’s welcome but said, “I only did my duty.” The long time ham operator W2ZXM turned down product endorsement offers that reached him via his sort wave radio, also turned down the million dollar offer from Hal Wallis to authorize a film about his ordeal, a film to be titled “The Flying Enterprise” with Burt Lancaster playing Carlsen. He even refused to let his hometown of Woodbridge change the name of the street he lived on from Alwat to Carlsen Street.

In New York, at a luncheon in Carlsen’s honor, he addressed the group “Frankly, I don’t think I’m entitled to this, I failed to bring my ship into port.” Continued

Carlsen continued; He did the only thing he could do said Carlsen's daughter Sonia Fedak, "His legacy was our standard to live by - a mark of excellence, a shining example, all wrapped up in humility."

I had not seen before a Lloyds of London Award bestowed on Captain Kurt shortly after the incident. "Lloyd's famed Bell Tolls for Captain Carlsen" and reported that the skipper had received a silver medal for "Meritorious Service at sea" the Lloyd's which insures maritime cargo. The Danish born Captain again said "I have not done anything that deserves recognition." I tried as a seaman to prove what a seaman is expected to do, Carlsen said.

Agnes Carlsen, Kurt's wife also wrote about the family's experience in a 1958 section of Guideposts, a Norman Vincent Peale publication. Titled "A Storm-lashed Prayer" - She wrote that she felt a bond with her husband when he was at sea through a Danish prayer - "Enighed gor staerk" or "In Unity there is strength!" Kurt chatted to us on the key and mike, used ham radio a great deal before and after the incident and was awarded the Flying Enterprise II to sail many more years. Partially scripted by Elias Holtzman, QSL from W8SU files - Kurt's memory will be around a long time to come I would imagine. May it be so.



Flying Enterprise -
KWFZ- with
American registry.